

TILES

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Tiles

in the Collection of
the Cooper-Hewitt
Museum



The Smithsonian
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Museum of Design

Tiles

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Library of Congress Catalog No. 80-65036

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Photography Tom Rose

Foreword



From the 19th century beginnings of the collections which were to become the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, it was intended that the objects preserved for study and enjoyment represent the major periods and styles that comprise the history of design and decoration. Specific types and materials were collected to document a broad and comprehensive survey of the decorative arts in its variations and forms.

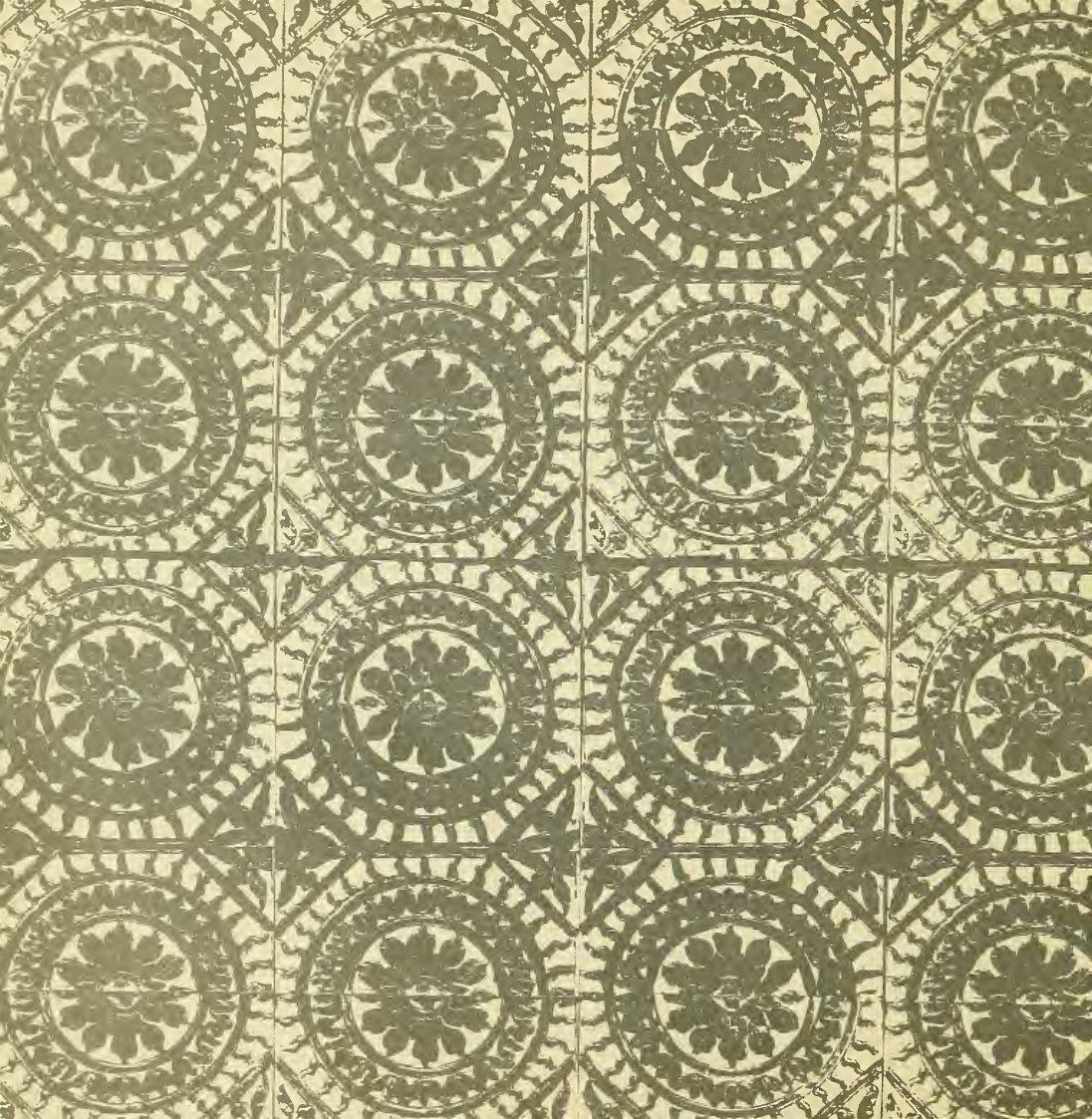
A prime example of this educational and historical approach is seen in the collections of ceramics at Cooper-Hewitt Museum. Not only have porcelains of the eighteenth century been acquired, but significant examples of earthenware and stoneware from both the East and West. A portion of the ceramics collection covers the history of tiles, one of the most richly varied groups within the history of ceramics.

The Cooper-Hewitt collection of tiles, which has continued to expand in quality and interest since the early

years of the Museum, contains superb Dutch pictorial tiles, early Middle Eastern examples, and brilliant Spanish tiles in a multitude of patterns and colors. In addition to these documentary groups are a fascinating variety of English, German, French, Italian and American tiles that trace the history of the craft over the last 400 years.

It is with pride that the collection of tiles at Cooper-Hewitt Museum is introduced with this publication, made possible through the generous assistance of the Charles E. Merrill Trust.

Lisa Taylor
Director



Ceramics, in the form of earthenware, stoneware or porcelain, reflect a continuous chronology of artistic enterprise from mankind's earliest prehistoric period to the present day. Even the most cursory glance at the historical and cultural development of human societies throughout the world indicates that nearly every culture has nourished a distinctive ceramic tradition. The objects produced from formed, dried, and fired clay are often inherently functional and useful. Ceramics are frequently used as vessels for the storage and serving of foods and beverages; they may also take the form of independent sculptural and figural creations. One important and often overlooked contribution of the ceramic artist to the history of the decorative arts is the production of tiles for use in both interior and exterior settings. A tile, like a brick, is a simply formed mass of clay, intended to be the outer casing for a wall, floor or other surface. Generally flat and thin, usually fired to a hard and brittle state, tiles are often coated with a glaze to provide a sur-

face impervious to moisture and resistant to wear and dirt. In contrast to bricks, however, tiles serve other direct and obvious ornamental functions within an architectural setting, in that they frequently provide the major color, texture and pattern for the surfaces of walls, ceilings, and floors. Both Eastern and Western cultures have preserved a proud tradition of tilemaking; techniques of fabrication, the ways in which tiles were used, and the patterns that were carved, stamped, glazed and painted vary greatly, and there are notable influences from one country to another.

The production of tiles usually begins with the formation of a smooth and pliable clay body, free of lumps, stones, and other impurities which may weaken the body of the tile or interfere with successful firing of the clay. Generally, local clays are mined near the place of production; these clays are carefully refined and mixed to produce a moist, workable mass. Since tiles are commonly flat and thin, the clay body is worked by hand and

with rollers or other flattening devices to produce a large, even slab from which the basic shapes — squares, rectangles or lozenges — are cut. Following this relatively simple procedure, tilemaking takes on a more complicated and fascinating aspect, for it is at this point that the decision is made regarding the decoration and ornamentation of the tile. Tiles may have relief decoration carved, scratched or impressed into the still-moist surface of the clay to produce three-dimensional relief patterns (Illus. 14) or sunken patterns of lines and shapes (Illus. 25). Since the majority of tiles intended for use in architectural settings are covered with a layer of protective glaze, the possibilities for pattern and color are nearly limitless; tiles may be glazed in a single color, but more frequently are decorated with several colors to produce a variety of lustrous and brilliantly patterned surfaces. Many tiles are decorated with solid expanses of color applied directly to the surface and fired in the kiln to weld the colors to the body (Illus. 15); in other in-

stances, the colors may be applied under or over the glazed surface. Underglaze patterns, generally painted with pigments derived from metallic compounds such as cobalt, manganese, copper and iron to produce a varied palette of color, may be painted freehand on the surface of the tile (Illus. 17), or copied from a stencilled or pricked pattern which guides the craftsman in the depiction of more complicated figures and scenes (Illus. 11). Colors, patterns and textures may be applied over the fired glaze, requiring an additional firing to secure the design to the glazed surface; overglaze enamels also may be painted by hand (Illus. 21) or even transfer-printed from engraved designs (Illus. 22). The range of possibilities for the decoration of tiles, as indicated in the selection of tiles from the Cooper-Hewitt collection, is nearly unlimited.

The sources for the decorative motifs used on tiles provide another fascinating area of study in the history of the medium. In many instances, pat-

terns for tile decorations are drawn directly or indirectly from natural forms; extremely popular throughout the history of tilemaking are patterns adapted from the world of plants—flowers, fruit, and foliage are seen on both Eastern and Western examples (Illus. 2, 9). Equally appealing are representations of animals of both domestic and exotic varieties (Illus. 26). Tiles may be used to record particular persons, families or associations (Illus. 13) and thus have a significant heraldic function. Allegories (Illus. 18) and narratives (Illus. 11) provide yet another rich source of inspiration for tile painters and designers; scenes chosen for depiction on tiles may be derived from popular literature, myth or Biblical sources. Throughout the entire history of tiles, geometric patterns are found (Illus. 5) in which brilliant fields of color are contrasted with one another on the glassy surface of the tile.

Basically, tiles are used in three different ways: the tile may be conceived and produced as a single unit to stand

by itself, or used to punctuate a plain surface; tiles may be used in a repeating pattern or sequence to produce a larger coherent pattern; or they may become the vehicle for a pictorial composition in which the pattern or scene depicted is painted on contiguous tiles, the tiles becoming a variation on a canvas or other painting ground. Tiles made in the latter fashion must be combined in a strictly predetermined plan to assure the sense and order of the pattern (Illus. 17).

Tiles have been used in many and varied settings, mostly architectural, ranging from the simple border of a wall or other surface (Illus. 8), to the covering of entire floors, walls, or even ceilings. Due to the fact that nearly all tiles have been made hard and dense by exposure to high firing temperatures, they are extremely resistant to damage from heat and flame and have thus been used as stove plates (Illus. 14) or as the backing for fireplaces. The insulative properties of tiles have not been

overlooked; tiles have been used to retain heat in cold climates and to preserve comfortable coolness in warmer climates, particularly on floors. The glass-like surface of glazed tiles have made them desirable additions to kitchens and areas subject to heavy use due to the fact that they are easily cleaned, resistant to most stains, and washable. These practical functions are significant in the history of tiles, but of greater importance is the potential for color, pattern and design which tiles contain, and the contribution of the tilemaker to the overall history of design in the decorative arts and architecture. A great variety of tiles, documenting the styles of many cultures and periods are found in the collections of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, and to understand their importance, it is essential to examine the contexts in which tiles have appeared.

Colored glazes that were used on tiles can be traced back to ancient Egypt, where the use of a distinctive deep turquoise blue glaze, derived

from copper, was developed. Patterns scratched or impressed on the surfaces of soft clay were filled with a thick layer of this glaze, producing variations in the surface color. This technique, similar in many ways to enamelling, has remained popular among tilemakers to the present day.

Mesopotamia early developed a sophisticated tile tradition that permitted a spectacular architectural application of glazed clay; undoubtedly one of the most familiar masterpieces of early glazed brickwork is the famed Ishtar gate at Babylon, which dates to the 6th century B.C. This gate provided access to the holy city, and was ornamented with large and commanding representations of lions. The sacred buildings themselves were covered with a variety of awe-inspiring images of bulls and dragons modelled in relief and glazed a brilliant yellow against a striking deep turquoise blue ground. These isolated examples of early glazed clay used as an architectural surface suggest the antiquity of the art of

tilemaking, and lead the way for developments of major importance in later periods.



1. England

Floor Tile, 14th century

Red earthenware, inlaid with pipe clay

Au Panier Fleuri Fund

1955-144-1

Among the earliest tiles in the Cooper-Hewitt collection is an English floor tile dated to the fourteenth century (Illus. 1). This small, square tile is made of deep red clay; the surface of the tile has been impressed with a negative pattern of a spread-winged, double-headed eagle. The sunken pattern has been inlaid with a cream-colored fine clay to produce a clear, contrasting pattern against the dark red; substantial traces of the inlaid clay are still visible. The inlaying of

one colored clay into another is a technique for tile decoration which flourished primarily in the Western world, and it has been suggested that floor tiles produced with this technique were ultimately inspired by the classical tradition of mosaic inlay used on floors and walls. In early inlaid tiles, the simple and often bold patterns were carved by hand in the tile surface prior to inlaying; later, a mold or stamp was used to create the depressed designs with greater ease and efficiency.

The design of the inlaid eagle on this tile suggests a heraldic function for the tile, although many examples of early inlaid tiles which survive are purely geometric. These single, rather small, tiles were frequently used in complex patterns covering an entire floor, in which individual patterned tiles became part of a larger overall design. Due to the thickness of the tile itself, and the deeply inlaid clay which, when fired, was united with the supporting clay body, these



2. Persia

Tile, possibly 13th century

Glazed earthenware, lustre decoration

Gift of the Estate of David Wolfe Bishop
1958-72-1

tiles were extremely durable floor coverings, and remained popular in England and France for several centuries.

In contrast to the bold inlay of this Western tile is an early Persian tile in the Museum collection (Illus. 2). This large tile was possibly used in a *mihrab*, the sacred prayer niche in a mosque. The thick tile is decorated with a raised inscription in blue set against a lustre-painted ground of en-

twined scrolls and stylized foliage. Persian tiles of the Islamic period (after 641) are among the most elegant and refined in the history of the craft. Of particular interest and beauty are those tiles made in the famed city of Kashan; by the 13th century, Persian tiles were generally referred to as *kashani* after the name of the prolific center from which most of these tiles issued. Many of the Kashan tiles, like the Cooper-Hewitt example, were decorated with a

metallic lustre, produced by covering the surface of a previously glazed tile with a metallic oxide derived from silver or copper. After application of the metal the tiles were fired another time in a reducing atmosphere produced by introducing smoke into the firing kiln. The process of making lusted ceramics in Kashan was described in one of the earliest treatises on ceramics dated 1301; written by Abulqasim ibn-Abdallah ibn-Ali ibn-Muhammed ibn-Ali Tahir, this book



3. Turkey

Wall Tile, late 16th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze
decoration

Gift of Mrs. Russell C. Veit
1951-66-9

records that "... everything which has had a fire of this kind glistens like red gold and shines like the light of the sun."

Used in a mosque, this tile indicates the close relationship that has traditionally existed between tilemaking and architecture. In the case of many Persian tiles, the function of the tile also reflects the religious implication of the image; due to the sacred nature of the mosque, no repre-

sentations of figures or animals were allowed, and the inscription and stylized foliage assumed great importance in the design. Figural representations did, however, appear on Persian tiles intended for secular settings.

The growth of an independent tile industry in Turkey was encouraged by an influx of Persian artists who settled in the country, bringing with them a specialized knowledge and skill in

the design and fabrication of architectural tiles. Another aspect of the Turkish tradition was the importation of large quantities of Chinese blue and white porcelain around the fourteenth century that inspired an entire range of beautifully painted underglaze decorated tiles. Many Chinese designs were copied or imitated by Turkish potters and painters, particularly in centers such as Damascus. However, the most skillful and elegant tiles were produced in the city of

Isnik (the ancient Nicaea). The clay used in the Iznik potteries was of a composition which fired nearly white; when combined with a white wash and clear glaze, this ceramic material provided a perfect foil for brilliant underglaze polychrome decorations (Illus. 3). Around the middle of the sixteenth century, a new color, red, was added to the traditional blue and white Iznik palette; this distinctive brilliant red, often referred to as “sealing wax” red, was used in combination with blue and green to produce stunning floral patterns. The Cooper-Hewitt tile from the Iznik workshops is decorated with stylized floral arabesques and blossoms that radiate from an eight-pointed blossom in the center. The tile is obviously designed to allow a continued pattern from one tile to the next. The colors of the tile are evocative of the rich splendors of the Middle East, and suggest the poetic and religious inspiration for Turkish architecture. Among the great masterpieces in the history of tiled architecture is that of the Çini Kiosk (attached to the Topkapı

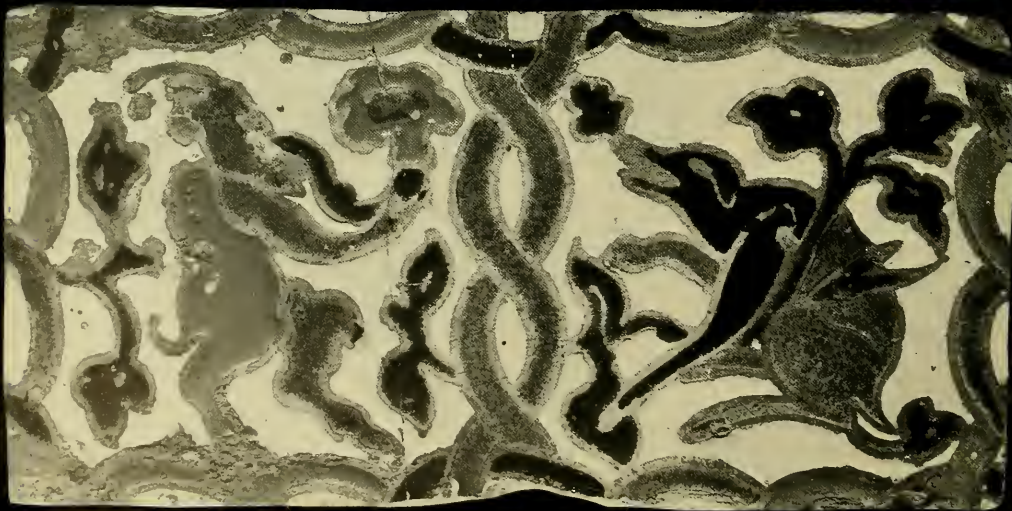
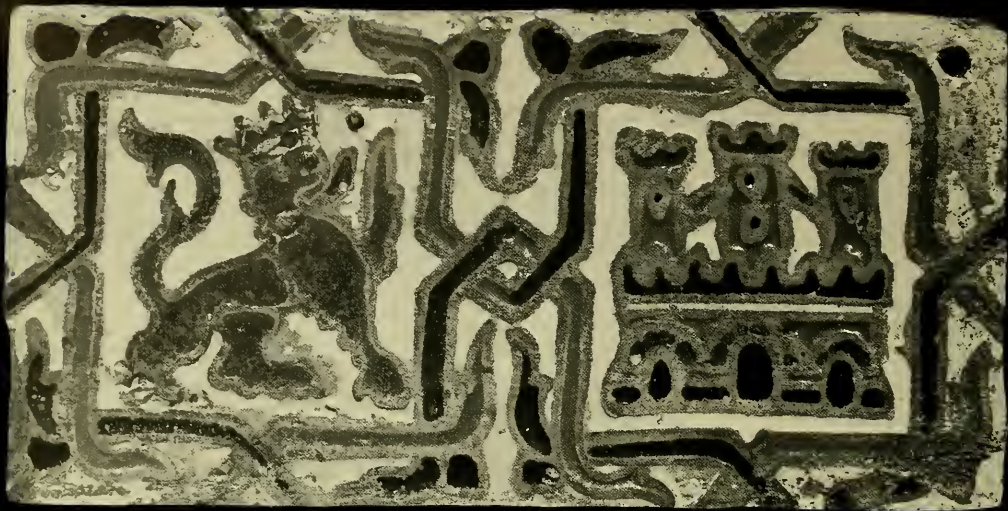
Museum); this monument richly deserves the praise which is recorded on its tiles in the 15th century when the building was constructed. Preserved for posterity is the sentiment that

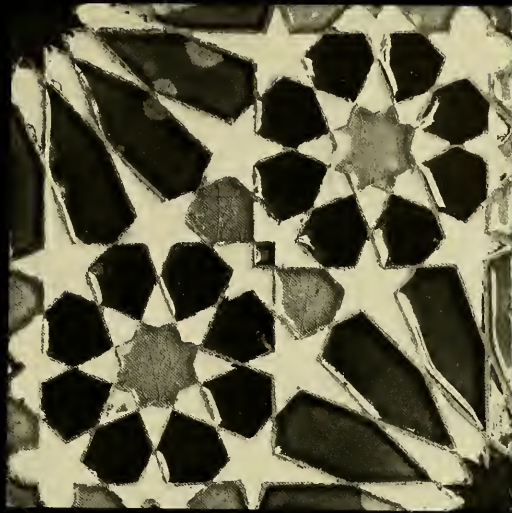
this pavilion, which is as lofty as the heavens, was so constructed that its great height would seem to stretch a hand up to the Gemini themselves. Its most worthless part would adorn the most precious item of Saturn's crown. Its emerald cupola sparkles like the heavens and is honoured with inscriptions from the stars. Its floor of turquoise with its varied flowers and chameleon decoration reminds one of the eternal vineyards of Paradise.

A distinctive and impressive tradition of tilemaking was seen to flourish in Spain and Portugal. In 711 A.D. the Iberian peninsula came under Islamic rule; with this political change came the influence of the artistic heritage of the Middle East. It was around the thirteenth century that tiles began to be produced in Spain, generally for

use as a paving material. Patterns for many early tile installations were produced by cutting colored glazed tiles into small pieces and laying these sections into a ground in the same way as mosaics. This expensive and time-consuming process for architectural enrichment was superseded by the development of fully-decorated tiles with multi-colored patterns on their surfaces; such tiles were known as *azulejos*.

Two important techniques were developed to enable craftsmen to work successfully with colored glazes on the tile surface. Bold colored glazes were used in close proximity to one another on these tiles; in the heat of the kiln, the glazes tended to run together and spoil the sharp geometric pattern or, even worse, resulted in a muddled mélange of colors. The first technique designed to solve this problem, and one which received general application in the Spanish tile workshops, was known as *cuerda seca*. In this technique, the lines which describe the patterns and col-





4. (left) Spain

Two Tiles, 17th century

Glazed earthenware (*cuerda seca* technique), blue, green and ochre decoration

Gift of Christian Rohlfing
1979-63-2,3

ors on the surface were laid on the tile with a greasy substance, and the patterns painted with glazes of varied colors. In the firing of the tile the greasy lines prevented the glazes from coming in contact; the lines themselves generally burned out to a deep brown or black. Clear and sharp patterns, frequently of complex geometric, organic and pictorial designs, were produced (Illus. 4).

5. Spain

Tile, 17th century

Glazed earthenware (*cuenca* technique), black, yellow and green decoration

Gift of the Misses Hewitt
1929-17-20

A second technique, known as *cuenca*, consisted of stamping the surface of the clay with a pattern that produced ridges of clay between the pattern sections. Thus, indented patterns, separated by "fences" of clay, resulted; these depressed areas were filled with glaze and fired in the usual manner. Sharply defined patterns with clear separations between colors were easily and efficiently

accomplished through this technique (Illus. 5).

In 1492, Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain expelled the Moors from the country, thus ending the long period of Moorish occupation. However, the artistic traditions of Moorish Spain continued for an extended period. Patterns and techniques developed for the production of tiles during the



6. Spain

Four Tiles, 17th century

Glazed earthenware, lustre decoration

Gift of Miss Sarah Cooper Hewitt

1907-36-1,2,3,4

Islamic period were maintained even as late as the seventeenth century, indicated by a group of four tiles in the Museum collection (Illus. 6). These tiles, part of a large repeating pattern, are ornamented in the *cuenca* technique with stylized rosettes and a sunburst pattern in radiant lustre against a white ground.

The third great influence in the history of tilemaking was the contribution of Holland. Few countries have established a reputation for the prolific production of charming and beautiful tiles to equal that of the Dutch. Dutch merchants were among the earliest to establish trade contacts with the Orient, and they imported vast quantities of Chinese blue and white porcelains which became the rage in Europe. In Dutch pottery workshops a conscious effort to imitate Oriental porcelains and to capitalize on the economic possibilities of supplying blue and white ceramics resulted in a ceramic industry which led European taste and made itself felt strongly in the European artistic and economic

7. Holland (probably Delft)

Tile, early 17th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze
blue decoration

Gift of A. W. M. Odé, Jr.
1937-50-2

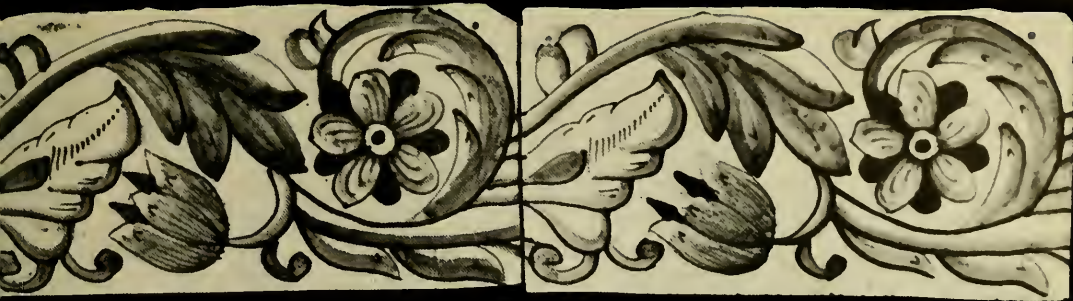
community. To achieve a pottery body of the whiteness of Chinese porcelain, the secret of which was unknown to Europeans until the early eighteenth century, the Dutch used a tin-oxide glaze which opacified in firing and obscured the colored clay underneath the glaze. Combining this sparkling white tin-oxide glaze with underglaze painting in blue or with polychrome colors, the Dutch created a successful pottery industry, a great portion of which was made up of tiles. Dutch tiles were inexpensive to produce, long wearing and decorative, and were exported throughout Europe, including clients in France, Poland, Germany, Russia and even to distant places like India. Among the most important orders for Dutch blue and white tiles was that placed for Louis XIV during the late seventeenth century construction of his famed "Trianon de Porcelaine," a fantasy palace of blue and white earthenware (both interior and exterior) built for the King's mistress Madame de Montespan.



Typical of seventeenth century Dutch tile design is a single tile (undoubtedly originally part of a large installation of similar tiles) that depicts in a shaped reserve a stylized tulip plant with three blossoms (Illus. 7). The tulip craze in Europe, to which the Dutch were the major supplier, is well-documented in tiles such as this. Examples of Dutch tiles of this period are also frequently painted in poly-

chrome and depict specific varieties of tulips. Most frequently seen, however, are tiles such as this, in which the tulip is represented in a highly stylized and simplified manner, with little concern for fidelity to the actual appearance of the plant or its blooms. The Oriental influence on blue and white tiles of the period is suggested by the corner devices which consist of crudely painted fretwork of Chinese derivation.





8. (above) Holland

Border Tiles, 18th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze
manganese decoration
Gift of Miss Edith Wetmore
1937-68-7



9. (far left) Holland (probably Delft)

Four Tiles, 17th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, blue, green
and yellow decoration
Gift of Mrs. Laurent Oppenheim
1934-5-6

10-a-d. (left) Holland

Four Tiles, 18th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze
blue decoration
Gift of Charles H. Vanderlaan, 1936-18-1
The Friends of the Museum Fund,
1938-12-8 a,b, c

Other seventeenth century Dutch tiles include references to the world of nature in the form of grapes and pomegranates (Illus. 9). These tiles are painted in a polychrome palette consisting of blue, green, and a strong yellow. Dutch tiles were frequently installed in the same way that one would expect to see wallpaper, covering entire interiors of the rooms of a house. Many tiles were specifically designed for use with the standard Dutch open fireplace (*smuiger*); such installations required an extensive number of tiles. Again, the ease with which glazed tiles can be cleaned was a factor in their choice for the backs and sides of smoky fireplaces. However, the tiles also performed another important function; since most Dutch houses were constructed of wood the danger from fire was great, and tiles retarded the direct heat of the flames. Special finishing borders (Illus. 8) were produced for such interiors.

The iconography of Dutch tiles runs the gamut from depictions of the



11a-d. Holland

Four Tiles, 18th century:

Biblical subjects

Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze manganese decoration

Gift of A. W. M. Odé, Jr.

1939-7-1,2,3,4

world of nature to contemporary figures of women and men (Illus. 10b, c), mythical sea monsters (Illus. 10a), and, of course, landscapes and seascapes (Illus. 10d). Most of these stereotypical designs were produced in enormous quantities for use at home and for export. In spite of the fact that the exuberance of the decoration and the style of the painting suggest that the tiles were entirely handpainted, the workers in Dutch tile factories actually relied most frequently on a paper pattern with the design pricked through in a series of tiny holes. This pricked pattern was laid on the prepared tile and dusted with powdered charcoal to cause the pattern to appear on the surface of the tile. The outlines thus produced were simply filled in and strengthened with cobalt blue applied with a series of special brushes.

Among the pictorial and narrative tiles produced by the thousands in the Dutch factories, many were based on

12. Holland

Tile Panel, 18th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze
manganese decoration
Anonymous gift

well-known Biblical stories. A group of four such tiles from the Museum collection (Illus. 11a-d) illustrates events drawn from the Gospels, such as the Crucifixion and Entombment of Christ. Each of the scenes is painted in a dark manganese purple within a circle; at the bottom of each vignette is a reference to the scene. It might be added that these citations were not always correct, and thus attest to the speed of production of these popular tiles.

Single pictorial tiles were used in patterned wall installations. The Dutch, however, also excelled at the production of continuous scenic tile panels, in which a large design was painted over multiple contiguous tiles. Of this type of tile panel, one example in the Cooper-Hewitt collection shows a still-life arrangement (Illus. 12) in which a vase of flowers is supported by a base painted with a seascape. The exuberant bouquet of tulips, roses and other miscellaneous flow-





13. Holland (probably Rotterdam)

Tile Panel, early 18th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze
manganese decoration

Gift of William Randolph Hearst
1941-76-1

ers is flanked by a pair of parrots. A more elaborate tile panel (illus. 13) was probably made as a special commission for Lubert Adoff Torck, to be used in Rozendaal Castle near Arnheim. The owner's monogram appears in the center of the panel, within a cartouche held aloft by chubby putti surrounded by a complicated network of scrolls, foliage, flowers and floral bouquets, and meandering baroque strapwork. The general design for this panel is related to the published works of Daniel Marot, a prolific Huguenot *ornemaniste* active in England in the late seventeenth century, but whose designs were known and copied throughout Europe. That the panel was intended to be viewed inset into a wall is indicated by the inclusion of a *trompe-l'oeil* marbled edge that surrounds three sides of the panel.

The work of other Continental tile factories can only be briefly surveyed here. Of more than passing interest is an elegant French seventeenth-century stove tile made of unglazed buff-colored earthenware in the

14. (right) France

Stove Tile, 17th century: "America"
Unglazed earthenware

Gift of the Trustees of the Estate of
James Hazen Hyde
1960-1-75

15. (below right) Germany

Stove Tile, 16th century: "St. Martin
and the Beggar"

Green lead-glazed earthenware

Purchase in memory of
Jacques Seligmann
1950-100-1

Museum collection (Illus. 14). This stove tile depicts in high relief the personification of the American continent. The striding figure is swathed in elaborate drapery; the identification of the figure as the "New World" is indicated by an accompanying inscription, but also suggested by the braids which depend from the elaborate French coiffure, the feathered armbands and skirt, and the peacock crest which crowns the head. Near the figure is a parrot devouring a highly stylized pomegranate beneath a swooping long-tailed bird, all evocative of the exoticism of the little-known continent.

The tile traditions of Germany are represented in the Cooper-Hewitt collections by a rare sixteenth century stove tile (Illus. 15) that depicts the story of St. Martin and the Beggar. The stove tile is glazed with a brilliant green lead glaze; the central scene of the saint cutting off a portion of his cloak to share with the poverty-stricken wretch occurs within an elaborate Renaissance-inspired architectural setting.





16. Germany (possibly Hamburg)

Stove Tile, 18th century

Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze blue decoration

Gift of Henry Frederick William Rave
1936-35-4

German tiles of the eighteenth century are related in both design and techniques of fabrication to those produced in the Netherlands; typical of the taste of the century were elaborate pictorial scenes. A stove tile (Illus. 16) in the form of a narrow rectangle is decorated with a heavy baroque border painted to suggest an aperture in a wall through which one views a delicately shaded landscape scene.

An Italian eighteenth century scenic panel, composed of fifteen tiles, is a virtuoso effort in scenic *trompe-l'oeil* (Illus. 17). The gray-white ground of the tiles is overpainted with what is apparently a curtained balcony. The curtain is held in place near the viewer on a rod attached to the wall. The balcony is painted with *faux marbre* moldings, and through the wrought iron railing is perceived a

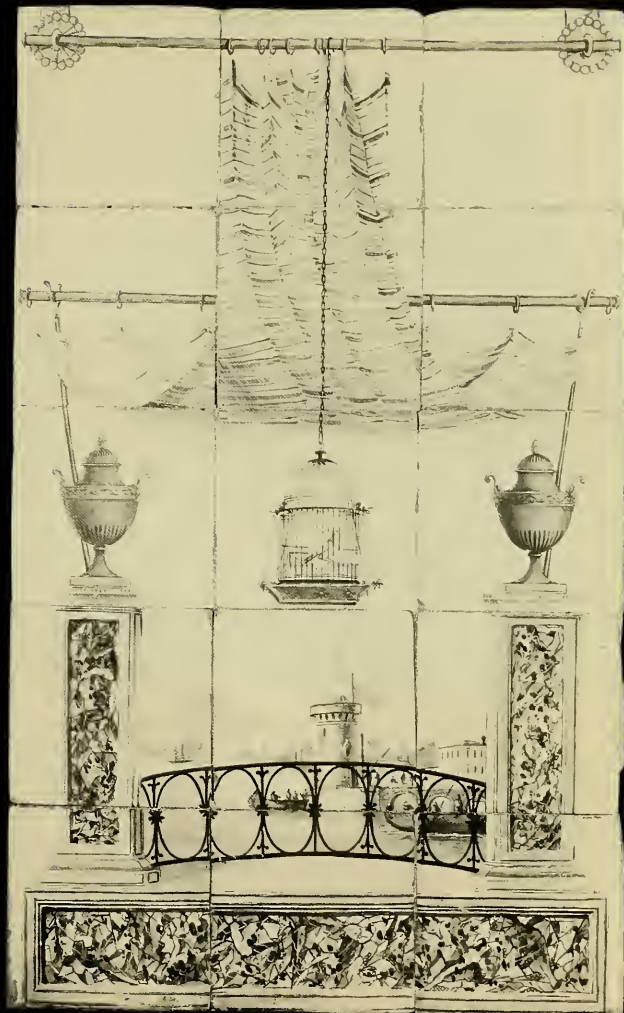
17. Italy (possibly Venice)

Tile Panel, 18th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, polychrome
decoration

Gift of the Misses Hewitt
1931-80-85

view of distant buildings mountains
and waterways. A final grace note to
the illusionistic effect is added by the
suspended bird cage complete with
a canary.

Later Spanish traditions in tile design,
particularly those of the eighteenth
and early nineteenth centuries, are
well-documented in the Cooper-
Hewitt collections. The tiles pro-
duced in Spain during this period
were frequently of two distinct
types: sophisticated narrative, picto-
rial and ornamental sequences not un-
like those produced in centers such
as Germany and Holland; and an ex-
traordinarily charming type of folk art
that emanated from centers in Alcora
and Valencia. These latter tiles de-
pict, with true folk-art innocence,
genre scenes and domestic activities
common to the area in which they
were produced.





18. Spain

Four Tiles, 18th century:

"The Four Continents"
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze
blue decoration

Gift of the Trustees of the Estate of
James Hazen Hyde
1960-1-72 a,b,c,d

Among the former type of tiles is an exceptional group of four tiles decorated with personifications of the four continents Asia, Europe, America and Africa (Illus. 18). Each tile, painted in underglaze blue, characterizes its respective continent with persons and activities suggestive of the geographic location. The tile representing "America," in contrast to the French example, shows an American Indian chief carried on a litter by four war-

riors with feather headdresses and skirts, while a fifth displays a large feather fan. At the head of this procession is a Spanish *conquistador*, shown in rear view perspective beneath a parrot perched on the branch of a tree. The sophistication of the perspective rendering of the horse and rider strongly suggest that a contemporary print was used as the source for the imagery; indeed, an engraving entitled "Florida" by



Theodor de Bry (1528–1598) was consulted for this image.

A group of four Spanish tiles selected from a large collection of related examples at Cooper-Hewitt (Illus. 19) shows folk pottery and tilemaking at its most winning. Each tile in this group depicts either daily routine activities such as marketing and the preparation of food, or containers for foods and beverages. In the scene of

cooking, a humorous touch is provided by the cat perched on one leg in eager anticipation of a morsel of the fish about to be dropped into the frying pan.

All of these tiles are painted in a rather naive, often clumsy, and certainly rapid, manner. The strong folk traditions indicated by such tiles are important documents in the qualitative differences in taste recorded in the

19a-d. Spain

Four Tiles, late 18th-early 19th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, polychrome decoration
Gift of the Misses Hewitt
1920-15-5-398



tilemakers art. These tiles were extremely popular for installations in kitchens, for they were able to withstand heat when used as a surround for cooking devices, and were also easily cleaned and thus sanitary. Tiles of similar nature often depicted entire ranges of food products; painted illusionistically, such tile walls might include fish, game and fowl hanging from kitchen hooks, and shelves of various ingredients and condiments.

A separate and equally delightful tile tradition grew up in England. Early English tiles were generally of the inlaid variety discussed earlier, or they

were imported from Flemish factories for use as paving tiles. In the middle part of the sixteenth century, two potters of Antwerp — Jasper Andries and Jacob Janson — founded a pottery workshop in Norwich, England, and produced tiles similar to Continental varieties. By the eighteenth century, however, a discernable English style was being produced at factories in London, Bristol and Liverpool. Two tiles from the Bristol factories (Illus. 20, 21) illustrate some of the designs and techniques fashionable for English interiors. The first of the tiles depicts a floral bouquet reminiscent of Dutch examples,

20. (above left) England (Bristol)

Tile, mid-18th century
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze blue and red decoration

The Friends of the Museum Fund
1938-12-1

21. (above right) England (Bristol)
Joseph Fowler factory

Tile, about 1760
Tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze manganese and overglaze white decoration

The Friends of the Museum Fund
1938-12-2



22. (above) England (Liverpool)
Sadler and Green factory

Tile, about 1760

Tin-glazed earthenware, red
transfer-printed decoration

Gift of Mrs. Harry Horton Benkard
1938-71-1



23. (above right) England

Tile, late 18th century

Tin-glazed earthenware, transfer-printed
and green decoration

including the ubiquitous flanking birds. The circular reserve is surrounded by a spattered red-orange ground punctuated at the corners by four stylized cherubim; the spattering of the surface was carried out after a stencil to protect the desired white areas had been placed on the tile. The second tile is painted in the center with manganese purple figures of vaguely Chinese inspiration on a particularly attractive bluish-white ground. Over the glaze are painted miscellaneous flowers and leaves in a pure and pristine white; this technique, known as *bianco sopra bianco* (white on white) is typical of English

tin-glazed earthenware of the mid-eighteenth century. The Dutch origins of the technique of tin-glazing is reflected in the English term "delftware," used to describe this entire family of ceramic products.

Another technique utilized in later eighteenth century English tile production was known as transfer printing (Illus. 22, 23). In this technique, an engraving was inked with enamel ink; upon removal of the image on paper from the engraved plate, the print was "transferred" to the glazed tile by applying the moist print to the surface. A subsequent firing bonded



24. England (Fulham)
Sand's End Pottery

Tile, 1898–1907, designed by William
Frend De Morgan (1839–1917)
Glazed earthenware, blue, green and
turquoise decoration

Purchase in memory of
Georgiana L. McClellan
1953-104-4

the printed image to the tile. One of the most active factories that produced transfer-printed tiles was founded in Liverpool by John Sadler and Guy Green. The rapid means of production through the use of transfers had enabled Sadler and Green by 1756 to decorate 1200 tiles in about 6 hours.

The nineteenth century saw the growth of highly efficient industrialized tile industries in many coun-

tries, but particularly in England. Commercial production of tiles satisfied the growing need for tile surrounds for the fireplaces which were appearing in more and more rooms in middle-class homes. The aesthetic quality of such tiles was criticized by many designers in the latter part of the century who wished to return the "art" of tile design to the medium. Among the influential and innovative designers who turned their attention to tiles was the Arts and Crafts



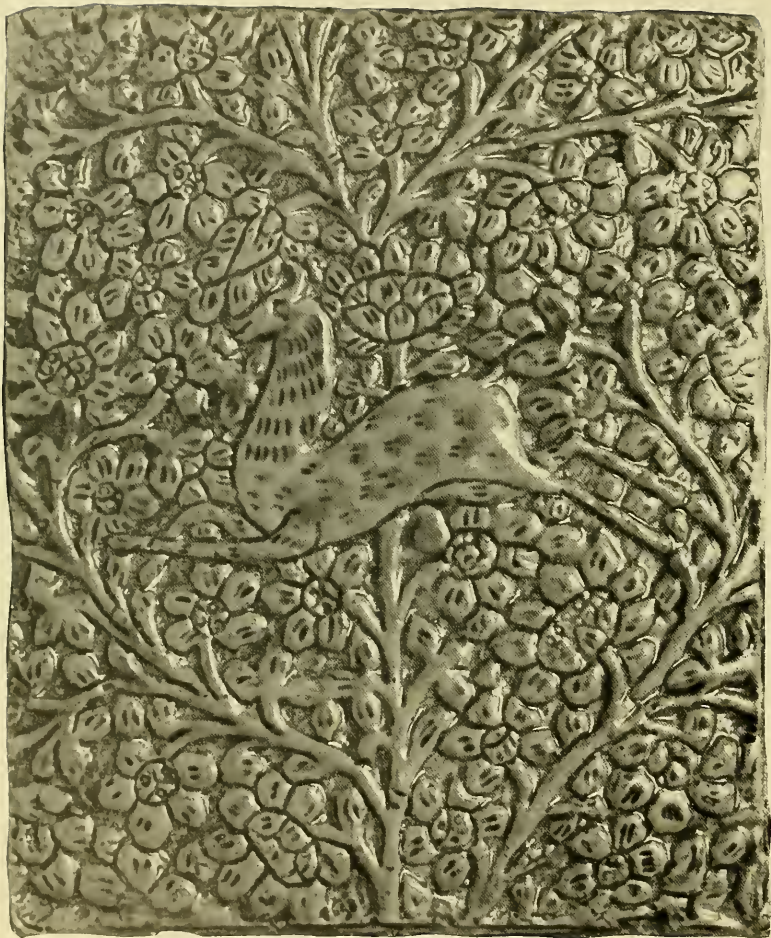
25. England (Fulham)
Sand's End Pottery

Tile, about 1900, designed by
Halsey R. Ricardo (1854–1928)
Green glazed earthenware

Purchase in memory of
Georgiana L. McClellan
1953-104-12

movement luminary William Frend De Morgan. Born in 1839, De Morgan was trained as an artist, and subsequently became a friend of the spearhead of the movement, William Morris. By the 1870's De Morgan had established his own ceramic factory in Chelsea, where he designed and produced ceramic vessels as well as tiles. In his early Chelsea years, De Morgan painted tiles on ready-made commercial "blanks." Following a move of the factory and the construc-

tion of kilns at Merton Abbey, and at Sand's End in Fulham, De Morgan produced tiles from the initial stages of clay preparation to the final firing of painted decoration. De Morgan tiles are notable for their rich and subtle coloration, particularly in subjects drawn from the world of plants and flowers (Illus. 24), but also for his clever use of impressed decoration and solid color glazes to produce rich surface effects (Illus. 25).



26. United States
(Doylestown, Pennsylvania)
Moravian Pottery and Tile Works
- Tile**, 1937: "Persian Antelope"
Glazed earthenware
The Misses Hewitt Fund
1937-62-3

This brief survey of the Cooper-Hewitt collection of tiles concludes with an example of American origin (Illus. 26). This tile, which depicts a "Persian Antelope" was made at the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works, founded by Henry Chapman Mercer in 1898 in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Mercer was among the leaders in the movement to revitalize the tile tradition in America; his initial efforts, however, were to reproduce examples of indigenous pottery found in Pennsylvania. Mercer chose designs from cast-iron stove plates of the eighteenth century, but also copied medieval and Middle Eastern examples. The bright red clay body of many Moravian Pottery and Tile Works pieces is enhanced with particularly

rich and watery glazes. It seems appropriate that this tile, made in the twentieth century and in the United States, based on early Persian examples similar to those early examples in the Cooper-Hewitt collection, should close this survey of the tiles preserved at Cooper-Hewitt Museum for the enjoyment of future generations of Museum visitors.

David Revere McFadden
Curator of Decorative Arts

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